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SENATOR DIRKSEN AND REPRESENTATIVE FORD

FRANK BLAIR: The two men who will have a great deal to say about how much of the President's program is accepted or rejected are Senate Republican leader Everett Dirksen, and House Republican leader Gerald Ford, and they are in our Washington studios this morning with Today Show Washington correspondent, Sander Vanocur. Sandy?

SANDER VANOCUR: Thank you, Frank. Senator Dirksen and Congressman Ford, the talk here in Washington is that this session of Congress is going to be completely dominated by the war in Viet Nam. Is this your assessment, Senator Dirksen?

SENATOR DIRKSEN: I doubt whether it will be completely dominated -- that is to say it will have its full share, of course. Obviously war is of prime significance to the people. It involves young blood, and we know how serious it is. It involves the national security, but there will be other issues as well. You have to finance a war. Do you do it by borrowing -- do you impose additional taxes on the people? That becomes an issue. Then of course you get the run-of-the-mine issues in nearly every field of activity, whether it be labor, agriculture, welfare. And then of course you have the Poverty program -- how much to lay out.

There is the question of what to cut back, what to put on the shelf, how far to cut it back -- all of those will be issues. But Viet Nam will be the dominant issue, I'm sure.

VANOCUR: But Senator, you said the other day that politicians don't make the issues. What did you mean by that?

SEN. DIRKSEN: Well, I mean simply that the issue makes the party, because it's when there is a division on an issue -- ten people on this side, ten people on that side -- or a hundred people, or a hundred thousand people -- that's when you get a partisan effort on each side of the issue. So it is not the party that

ever makes the issue, it's the issue that finally makes the party. And that will be true in the thinking of the American people. I've said over and over again, we don't make an issue as such. People make the issues finally, because they are constantly ventilating their views on the subject, and so they naturally divide. And I think we can put our finger on the whole problem by saying that in this case, it's a question of opinion, as to what to do, in order to bring this to an end, how to do it, and yet be sure that you reprove your pledges and your objectives.

VANOCUR: Congressman Ford, when the session was under way last year, some members of the House -- Republican members -- presented their plan for Viet Nam. Do you have a plan you're going to present this year, on it?

CONGRESSMAN GERALD FORD: Well, I would say, Sandy, that the Republican position today would follow the guidelines of the Republican Coordinating Committee meeting in December of this year, when the legislative leaders, the governors, and others, met in Washington, and decided (one) that we would fully support any efforts at peace that would lead to a permanent and secure objective for our position in South Viet Nam. And at the same time we said that the President ought to be cautioned against getting us involved in a large scale ground war in South Viet Nam. And we suggested that before getting so involved, that there ought to be a Kennedy missile-type quarantine imposed on the port of (Haiphong?) and that we ought to intensify our air strikes against the North Vietnamese.

This, I think, is the position that the Republicans across the board have taken, and will take in 1966.

VANOCUR: But Congressman, isn't that wanting to have your cake and eat it too -- you want to have peace and yet you're suggesting that the President be more bellicose about fighting the war -- do it on the cheap, so to speak -- with bombs rather than men. Isn't this a real dilemma for you?

CONG. FORD: I don't think so, because there is strong military advice to the effect that we can do more with those areas where we have a vast superiority -- in the air and on the sea. A good many military people doubt that we have fully utilized this capability, that we've not extended ourselves in this way as well as we could, and that we've made too many commitments on the ground.

VANOCUR: Senator Dirksen, in the Republican Party in the Senate, does the Party represent a unified front on Viet Nam, or are there some Senators who would line up with those Democratic Senators who have been criticizing the Administration and who may take a different approach from the Administration -- I speak of Senator John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, for example.

SEN. DIRKSEN: You probably will never get complete unanimity, because I know the diversity of thinking in the Senate, on our side of the aisle. That would be true, not only of Viet Nam, but that is true of so many things, and you can't always expect that you'll have a completely united front on it. There will be ideas other than those that seem to appeal to the Party generally, but it has always been so, and I presume it always be.

G. FORD: Wouldn't you say, though, that there is unanimity among Republicans, Senator, on the basis that we must meet the challenge of communism in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. It's a matter of how you go about it, and I think in the House of Representatives, even though we may have some diversity as to techniques, or viewpoints to a degree, there is unanimity that the United States has to meet this challenge in Southeast Asia, or anywhere else, that's presented to the country by the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc?

And may I add one comment to what was asked earlier? The question of how issues are developed, I'm sure Senator Dirksen and myself have been asked many many times, will the war in Viet Nam be a political issue in 1966? Certainly the Republicans ought not to make it a political issue. I think the consequences ought not be serious, the stakes are too high, as far as the country is concerned. But, if the Commander-in-Chief, or the Administration doesn't run the war well, if they don't do things that protect our best interests in the minds of the American people, the people themselves will make the issue.

DIRKSEN: They always do. I remember the campaign of 1944. I was campaigning all over the country. I was belaboring agriculture, taxes, this and that, but always you got back to the business of war. And I don't know how many mothers and fathers would come up and say, well, if so-and-so is elected, will he pick a new Cabinet? Will he have a new Chief of staff of the Army? They didn't argue -- they just asked, then they walked away, and you know what was in their hearts. And as a result, they very quietly made the issue -- the Parties didn't make the issue, as such.

But a further observation here, with respect to what you said a moment ago. I think the essential thing always is this, and you can put it in two phases -- one, it's a question of choice of method, in order to bring this to a conclusion. Do you bomb Hanoi, or don't you? Right there you get a division of opinion. Do you bomb Haiphong? Well, suppose they retaliate by bombing with heavy mortars, Saigon. In the Mansfield Report, there is a very significant little sentence. It says that Saigon is really hostage to Haiphong and Hanoi, or vice versa, and that is quite true, I think, and there's a great significance in it.

So first, what is the choice, in order to bring it to an end? Secondly, what dare you reasonably expect if perchance the peace feelers are effective and you get them around the table -- who do you get around the table. Secondly can you be sure there

will be a guaranteed freedom and independence of South Viet Nam? Now that's going to be the final and the residual issue. If it isn't, then every life that's sacrificed will be in vain, because that's the pledge we're trying to redeem.

VANOCUR: Sir, let's take those two points. What about bombing Haiphong or Hanoi, or both, and what about the inclusion of the Viet Cong, the National Liberation Front, at the bargaining table, if talks should begin? What is the Republican position on those two points?

CONG. FORD: My answer would be, Sandy, that at this time there are significant military targets outside of the civilian populations in Hanoi, and in Haiphong -- targets that are high on the priority list that would have a severe impact on the capability of the Viet Cong to pursue the war further. And these are the kind of targets that I think many of our military people feel should be hit today. I don't think we have to go after civilian populations in these large metropolitan areas of Hanoi and Haiphong. There are better, more effective, significant military targets today that can be hit by our air power.

VANOCUR: What about the inclusion of the National Liberation Front in peace talks?

SEN. DIRKSEN: The question always is, if they set their feet down, if they have the Marxist fixation, what do you do? Does it become a vanity? Does it wind up finally in no kind of a deal at all? You have to start with the assumption -- and the proper assumption -- that the Liberation Front is definitely a communist front. Now the fellow who ought to be at the peace table would be Ho Chi Minh. After all he represents, and he's the head, of North Viet Nam. I put it on the basis of who sits in on the poker table. If you haven't got any chips in the pot, you haven't got any business sitting at the table. And that's a matter that's going to have to be very, very carefully surveyed.

VANOCUR: Well, on this point, at what point is the Republican Party in the Senate and in the House, going to demand that the bombings be resumed in the North, --

SEN. DIRKSEN: Well, there are factors there, I am sure, of which we've got to take account, and of which we don't always know -- now, to a degree at least, they respected a Christmas truce, to be sure there were violations -- many of them were petty, but now they have, what is it -- the Lunar holiday -- they call it (Tett?) I think -- I don't know what its religious significance is, but suppose, up to a point at least, we don't respect it. Look at the propaganda weapon you'd give them, right away. Now you can argue on the other side that in that interim period they can build up their defenses, they can fill up their supply lines, they can bring in new troops, particularly their regulars, that is quite true. But on the other hand, at the same

time, not the least of the factor that you have to take into account is the respect of the world. Now if suddenly they would say, why the United States doesn't respect a religious holiday of the other side, notwithstanding the fact that substantially they complied with the truce request for a period of thirty hours. It didn't last quite that long, but at least it was a respect for what we offered.

REP. FORD: I think it's well to point out, Sandy, that we have approximately 100,000 U. S. Army troops in South Viet Nam, and we have 10 or 12,000 U. S. Marines in South Viet Nam. If we permit the flow of Viet Cong regulars, without any hindrance, into South Viet Nam, in substantial numbers -- and I think this is taking place today -- at one point we have to take into consideration the views of those men who are from the United States who are fighting in Viet Nam. We can't permit them to become overwhelmed by additional Viet Cong forces. And the use of our air power is effective, to a degree, in preventing the flow of Viet Cong regulars and supplies into South Viet Nam.

So at one point the President has to make a decision, when is he going to stop this extra burden being placed upon our U. S. GI's, who are over there on our behalf.

VANOCUR: It seems to me, gentlemen, that the crucial thing is, at what point does Republican support for the President either cease or diminish? Now, Senator, you said you were the first to raise your hand for the President. Will you go all the way down the line with him, on the war in Viet Nam, no matter what his choices are?

SEN. DIRKSEN: Sandy, you can put that in a very simple phrase. The President is not only the Chief Executive of the United States, he is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Our constitutional power is to raise and equip armies and navies, and to provide the necessary funds, because you can't take a dollar out of the Treasury without an appropriation made in pursuance of law. However, I know of nothing in any court decision anywhere that has ever de-limited the power of the Commander-in-Chief. Now so long as we have an opportunity to offer our substitutes, our alternatives, our opinions, our suggestions, and they're thrown around the table, and carefully discussed -- when the decision is finally made, what to do in the interests of the unity of this country, because you cannot, and you dare not, present a dis-united front to a fevered world, you go along with the Commander-in-Chief.

VANOCUR: But--

SEN. DIRKSEN: But, when it comes to asking for money, Congress has never been niggardly about that -- whatever their estimate is, there may be a little bit here and there that you would take off, others who would want to enlarge it, but as a general thing, there has never been any difficulty in Congress with respect to necessary funds. They'll have to come up before

the Committees, and justify those funds. But all that is just part and parcel of the ground work, but when the decision is made, that's it -- because the President is the exclusive conductor of our foreign policy.

VANOCUR: Thank you very much, Senator Dirksen, Congressman Ford -- now back to Today in New York.

BLAIR: So that's what Congress will be about, at least from the Republican side of the aisle, and we certainly thank you distinguished gentlemen, and you, Sender Vanocur. . .